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Chairman: Mr. Wolfe ..... (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 63: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/62/38, A/62/177, A/62/202 and A/62/290)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/62/173, A/62/201 and A/62/188)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/62/178)

1. **Mr. Pak** Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply in reference to the statement by the representative of Japan made at the previous meeting, said that Japan claimed that its sixty-year-old crimes should not be discussed in the United Nations. Those were crimes against humanity, however, on which no statute of limitations was imposed; for example, Nazi criminals from the Second World War were still being brought to trial. If the history of some 200,000 so-called comfort women from his country brought to Japan as sexual slaves during the War was not to be discussed, the world would be doomed to repeat such crimes.

2. The issue of abductions which Japan had raised was comparatively minor, and his Government had been generous in its response. It had formally expressed its regret and had been cooperating in allowing the abductees to return home and providing information on those already deceased. Several rounds of talks had taken place, but Japan was not sincere. His delegation called on Japan to take a constructive attitude to those talks if it really wanted to solve the problem.

3. **Mr. Tupouniua** (Tonga) said that 2007 was the halfway mark towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and Tonga was committed to their full implementation. The inclusion and advancement of women lay at the heart of the development of a civil society that was democratic, peaceful and productive.

4. Tonga had recently experienced civil unrest, and had begun a review of its political reform agenda, including the process of national reconciliation. Tongan women played a pivotal role in reconciliation by holding their families together and working to solve problems at the grass-roots and at the national level. With a 99 per cent literacy rate, they had equal access to education at all levels in order to acquire the skills necessary to participate in all sectors.

5. Tonga encouraged the participation of women in politics and had opened the way for women to hold leadership positions in the public sector, an important step in gender mainstreaming. In order to equip them to enter the business sector, training had been provided to help women set up business plans and open microenterprises.

6. In 2006 the Privy Council had proposed amendments to the land laws to allow women, in cases where there was no direct male heir, to inherit registered allotments of land, allowing daughters to inherit from their fathers in the absence of a male heir. If the proposal was accepted, it would enhance the economic status of Tongan women.

7. Tonga was determined to improve the health of mothers and the physical safety of girls. Although it had not yet signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, it worked closely with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure that women's issues took a central place in Government policies.

8. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Nepal) welcomed the progress made in setting standards for the promotion and protection of women's rights. Nepal attached great importance to the role of the United Nations for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.

9. Nepal had made significant strides towards gender equality and empowerment. Women had equal property and citizenship rights, and were guaranteed at least one third of seats on elected bodies, including Parliament. The Interim Constitution of February 2007 guaranteed civil liberties and fundamental freedoms to all without distinction. The Interim Development Plan 2007-2010 gave high priority to poverty alleviation, girls' education, women's access to economic resources, political and social empowerment and elimination of gender discrimination.

10. As a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, among other international human rights instruments, Nepal had been submitting its periodic reports on implementation. He appealed for increased technical assistance, especially to the least developed countries, meeting reporting obligations under such instruments.

11. The Government had taken several legal, administrative and policy measures to end discrimination and violence against women, including severe penalties for sexual harassment, domestic violence and trafficking.

12. Finally, he expressed support for United Nations efforts towards gender equality. It should extend support to developing countries, especially the least developed, to enhance their national capacity for the development of women.

13. **Ms. Swengbe** (Liberia) said that the Division for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) had made a great deal of progress in supporting countries to advance gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the world. UNIFEM support to the strengthening of ministries for women's affairs had become the engine of gender mainstreaming. Through such an initiative, Liberia had been able, in its new rape law, to align the Penal Code with the human rights standards set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The law had been adopted after advocacy by many rights organizations, which had established the basis for national dialogue and mobilization on the issue.

14. Liberia had always placed high priority on the advancement of women as a national policy. Perhaps the best testimony of that had been the 2005 election of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as President, the first democratically elected woman President in Africa and among the few women heads of State and Government in the world.

15. It would require the political will of national Governments, and the international community and the financial and material support of the Division and the specialized agencies to improve the status of women globally. She therefore expressed the hope that all Member States would remain committed to the cause of women's rights and equality in responding to the needs of humanity in general.

16. **Mr. Gankhuyag** (Mongolia) said that poverty and unequal access to economic resources continued to be among the main obstacles to the attainment of gender equality for rural women in Mongolia. His Government attached great importance to the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the national development strategy, especially in the area of rural development. The law on domestic violence adopted by Parliament in 2004 outlined concrete actions and regulations to protect victims of domestic violence, and a working group had been set up to design a national programme with the participation of relevant Government departments and non-governmental organizations. In recent years, partnership between Government and civil society organizations undertaking activities on gender equality had been strengthened.

17. With respect to political empowerment of rural women, more effective measures must be undertaken. Amendments to the Law on Political Parties and the Election Law had been introduced with the intention of increasing women's representation as candidates for elected office to a minimum of 30 per cent, which would give them a greater voice in making policy.

18. There was also an endeavour to promote employment through enhancing the skills of women living in rural areas, especially female heads of households, in order to alleviate poverty. Vocational training centres had been established to provide both formal and non-formal education. The Master Plan for Education 2006-2015 had established objectives for general improvements to the quality of education, which would reduce migration to urban areas and support regional development. The Government, in collaboration with the International Development Association of the World Bank, had developed the Sustainable Livelihoods project, which was intended to increase availability of microcredit services in selected parts of the country. Those policies and activities were aimed at improving the plight of rural women and empowering them to be both contributors to and beneficiaries of development efforts.

19. **Ms. Al Mansoori** (United Arab Emirates) said that her Government was committed to implementing the recommendations and outcomes of all regional and international conferences on the advancement of women, particularly the Beijing Declaration and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The United Arab Emirates had issued a number of laws to regulate the work of expatriate labourers in the country, with a special focus on women in order to protect their rights and dignity and guarantee them humane and suitable working conditions.

20. Her Government had taken a series of other steps in previous years to work for the advancement of

women, such as acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and launching a political reform plan to expand women's role in the political process. Women held two seats in the cabinet and about a fourth of the seats in the Federal National Council, the United Arab Emirates' parliamentary body. That was considered one of the highest ratios of women's participation in parliaments, by international standards. Enrolment rates of girls in grade schools and higher education had risen, as had the percentage of women holding advanced degrees. Women occupied two thirds of public sector jobs, 30 per cent of which were leadership and decision-making positions. Her Government continued to work to eliminate social and psychological obstacles to the full integration of women in all professional fields.

21. **Mr. Arguello** (Argentina) stressed the importance of the empowerment of women and gender equality for sustainable development. He therefore welcomed the ratification by the National Congress of Argentina, 30 per cent of whose members were women, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He also noted that, since the constitutional reform of 1994, the Convention itself had the same legal force in Argentina as the Constitution. The Convention and Constitution were complemented by a comprehensive normative framework, including the 2005 National Plan to Combat Discrimination, the Reproductive Health and Responsible Procreation Act, the recent Sex Education Act and proposed amendments to the Penal Code which would deal inter alia with sexual assault.

22. The only way to prevent, eliminate and punish violence against women was to put an end to impunity. His Government was combating the stereotypes about women's role that were often the underlying cause of violence against women through the work of the National Women's Council, the Secretariat for Human Rights, the Tripartite Commission on Equality of Opportunity of the Ministry of Labour, the Victim Assistance Department of the Office of the National Prosecutor for Administrative Investigations, the Programme against Violence of the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the Women's Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

23. At the regional level his Government had hosted the third meeting of experts of the follow-up mechanism to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, in June 2007 in Buenos Aires. His Government supported the commitment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to a stronger and more visible role for the Organization in efforts to eliminate violence against women and the launch towards the end of 2007 of a global campaign on violence against women. That support was in keeping with his delegation's belief in the importance of women's role in promoting sustainable development, human rights and security.

24. **Ms. Haile** (Eritrea) underscored the importance of the advancement of women and said the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly continued to provide the best tools for gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, the achievement of gender equality required more than merely outlawing discriminatory laws and practices; a concerted effort must be made to address situations of inequality.

25. Accordingly, her Government had made the advancement of women a key priority. For example, the Constitution of Eritrea mandated that 30 per cent of seats in Parliament were reserved for women, and women had a constitutional right to be candidates for election at all levels of government. Eritrea's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper put special emphasis on women's needs, and targeted measures had been adopted to improve women's access to resources, opportunities and basic social services.

26. Her Government was improving infrastructure and promoting economic strategies that had a direct impact on the lives of women in such areas as improved communications, electrification of rural areas, access to clean drinking water, basic education and microcredit. The National Education Gender Policy and Strategy was aimed at eliminating gender disparities at the primary and secondary levels and achieving universal primary education by 2015, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

27. Steps had been taken to ensure women enjoyed full access to health care and the necessary information to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. More health-care professionals would be trained, and adequate resources would be provided to health-care centres. Vitamin supplements, iodine and mosquito nets would be

provided to women of reproductive age. Furthermore, the continuing awareness-raising efforts of the National Union of Ethiopian Women and her Government and the recent adoption of a law banning female genital mutilation should lead to the elimination of that practice.

28. **Mr. Dicko** (Mali) said that women played an important role in the economic, political and social development of Mali. Although the basic legal texts of the country guaranteed women equality, juridical, socio-economic and cultural barriers to effective equality for women remained. Accordingly, his Government had committed itself to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

29. The gender dimension had been integrated into all policies and programmes. Efforts were being made to increase girls' school attendance rates, and education centres for development had been established in rural areas to provide illiterate or dropout 12 to 15-year-olds with training in the areas of literacy, civics, prevention of HIV/AIDS and job skills. In order to empower women, a microcredit scheme had been implemented, and efforts were likewise under way to provide rural women with options for productive activities, for example development of irrigated land for market gardening or small-scale processing of agricultural products, so that they could increase their income and become financially independent.

30. His Government, 28 per cent of whose elected representatives were women, was committed to promoting women's rights. It had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the protocol thereto. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family had been established, Caesarean sections were provided free of charge, efforts were being made to eliminate female genital mutilation and regular reports were prepared on the status of women. His Government had hosted an African regional conference on literacy in Bamako, 10 sites had been designated for the building of women's and children's centres and a Ministry for Basic Education, Literacy and National Languages, headed by a woman, had been established.

31. In spite of encouraging results, however, Mali did not have sufficient resources adequately to promote the advancement of women. He therefore called on the international community and donors to make a greater effort to provide assistance to Mali so that poverty could be eliminated and future generations guaranteed a better life.

32. **Mr. Penjo** (Bhutan) recalled that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was among the first international conventions that his Government had ratified and said that it looked forward to close cooperation with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Progress made and remaining challenges had been identified in his delegation's latest periodic report to the Committee.

33. Bhutan had a comprehensive range of social, economic, political and social frameworks further to enhance the already relatively equal status of women, eliminate any remaining discrimination and strengthen the implementation of the Convention. In keeping with the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a National Commission for Women and Children had been established in 2004 to monitor women's and children's rights and investigate abuses; it would soon become independent of the Government, which would strengthen its mandate and enhance its legitimacy and influence. The Commission was in the process of finalizing a National Gender Plan of Action.

34. His Government welcomed the growth in the number of NGOs and civil society groups devoted to women's issues and looked forward to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including universal primary education and the empowerment of women. The enrolment rate for primary education was 96 per cent and gender equality was virtually at par at the primary and secondary levels, although achieving equality at the tertiary level by 2015 would pose a challenge. Free health care was available, with particular attention given to women's health, especially reproductive health. Significant progress had been made in the areas of infant and maternal mortality rates, child nutrition and access to clean drinking water.

35. Bhutan's people-centred philosophy of Gross National Happiness emphasized the role of women in a happy and responsible society. Women's rights

occupied an important place in the democratization process: the draft Constitution guaranteed women's right to participate in society as equals and also provided protections against all forms of discrimination, exploitation, violence, harassment and intimidation in both the public and private spheres.

36. His Government cooperated with the efforts of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in promoting women's issues and had ratified the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and the SAARC Code for the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition. A gender database was being prepared by SAARC to generate data on violence against women, especially with regard to trafficking, the feminization of poverty and health, including HIV/AIDS.

37. **Ms. Bowen** (Jamaica) said that her Government's approach to the advancement of women was multisectoral and based on the work of its Bureau of Women's Affairs, the research undertaken at the University of the West Indies and the efforts of NGOs. At the regional level, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) secretariat ensured coordination and promoted training in women's issues. The United Nations likewise provided crucial technical assistance.

38. Much progress had been made towards the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Jamaica's national Gender Development Index indicated that women's life expectancy, income, school enrolment rate and participation in politics had improved. Those successes could be attributed to a consistent strategy of gender mainstreaming, which had increased the number of women in positions of influence.

39. Challenges nevertheless remained, including pervasive violence against women and poverty attributable partially to the number of women heads of households and an unemployment rate for women double that of men. Her Government was also closely monitoring the situation of human trafficking, in particular in women and girls, in order to ensure that it did not become a problem in Jamaica. The current year was the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, and it was therefore fitting that her Government had recently enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act. Other legislation had also been adopted or was being considered to address the problem of discrimination against women.

40. The advancement of women required international cooperation in such areas as the sharing of best practices and the implementation of agreed strategies. The United Nations played a key role in standard setting and encouraging consultation and adoption of strategies as well as in providing technical assistance. The Organization had established an impressive number of entities dealing with the advancement of women. She welcomed its efforts to deliver services at various levels, particularly the country level, and noted the special role played by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in particular with regard to technical assistance. In that regard, she welcomed the recommendation of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence concerning the creation of a stronger, unified gender entity with a view to raising the profile of women's issues and looked forward to the intergovernmental response to that recommendation. She stressed, however, that the integrity of the responsibilities and mandates of the United Nations for the delivery of services at the country level should not be compromised by any new arrangement. Her delegation would participate in discussions of the recommendation with a view to ensuring that Member States' concerns were debated fully.

41. **Ms. Cavalieri** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, despite her Government's reaffirmation of women's central role in society, an unfortunate gap remained with regard to gender equality and recognition of women's contribution to society. Women remained invisible in many countries, victims of the oppression imposed by an unjust model of development. That was why the new model of development that her Government strove to institute aimed to guarantee women's human rights and gender equality, thus freeing women from their historical domination and exploitation.

42. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had incorporated the notion of equality between men and women into its Constitution in 1999, when it had been approved by popular vote. In keeping with its vision of gender equality, the Government was executing a

policy of eradicating discrimination and violence against women. Some of the most important actions taken in support of that policy were: the establishment of shelters for women who were victims of domestic violence; a social programme that paid the national minimum wage to women living in extreme poverty while training them for work; and the granting of microcredit to women under the auspices of the Women's Development Bank.

43. Women's participation in public life was without precedent in Venezuela. Three of the five branches of government — the legislative, electoral and judicial branches — were headed by women.

44. Her Government reaffirmed the importance of fulfilling the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and it supported all international initiatives to take actions called for in the Platform of Action and in the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Venezuela also recognized the invaluable contributions of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee had conducted a workshop to assist Venezuela in preparing its next periodic report.

45. **Ms. Kulzhanova** (Kazakhstan) said that the world's women still had unequal access to resources and opportunities and were victims of abuse, poverty and discrimination. The participation of women was a prerequisite for development and access, particularly of rural women, to training, and microcredit must be increased. Member States should take steps to bridge income gaps between the sexes based on comparisons of wages in female- and male-dominated occupations. It was vital also to integrate women into economic decision-making and implement work-life policies that included childcare, parental leave and flexible working schemes for both men and women. Stronger emphasis should also be placed on the participation of men in the advancement of women and the elimination of discrimination.

46. Her Government had demonstrated a commitment to women's issues throughout the country's transition period, both de jure and de facto. The National Commission for Women and Gender Equality was taking the lead in implementing the national strategy on gender equality for 2006-2016, which had been elaborated in line with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in cooperation with the United Nations country team and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The strategy's 2006-2008 implementation plan covered the political and economic advancement of women, reproductive health, violence against women and children and gender equality in family relations. The "Otbasy" ("Family") parliamentary group had introduced a bill on equal rights and opportunities which envisaged the mandatory gender-sensitive evaluation of new and existing laws, regulations and national programmes as well as the use of gender budgeting. Women's representation in the lower chamber of parliament had increased from 11 per cent to 15.8 per cent as a result of the August elections in Kazakhstan.

47. A bill on domestic violence envisaged a standard set of methods and practices for law-enforcement bodies and community organizations as well as the development of a legal mechanism to prevent domestic violence. Various legislative amendments to existing laws were also under consideration with a view to strengthening liability for harassment and violence against women. Twenty-six crisis centres for victims of domestic violence had also been established throughout the country.

48. The High-Level Regional Consultation on Gender Equality and Development Planning and Budgeting in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), held in Almaty in May and organized jointly with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), was but one example of the country's effective cooperation with the Fund. The Consultation had been attended by more than 100 high-level decision makers representing Governments and civil society from 10 CIS countries, as well as bilateral and multilateral development partners. The ensuing Almaty Declaration would constitute the Commonwealth's contribution to the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to be held in Accra, Ghana, in September 2008.

49. Despite progress achieved, Kazakhstan continued to face serious challenges to the advancement of women, such as discrimination in the labour market, lack of awareness of gender issues among boys and men, negative gender stereotyping and obstacles to the enjoyment of women's reproductive health rights. Convinced that the whole of society benefited from

women's development, her delegation would continue to work to that end in close cooperation with the United Nations system and relevant NGOs.

50. **Ms. Morgan-Moss** (Panama) said that progress had been achieved in her country with regard to the advancement of women through various institutional mechanisms, such as the establishment of a National Council for Women in 1995. Law No. 22, enacted in 1997, required at least 30 per cent of a political party's candidates, as well as those seeking posts within the party, to be women. Though the situation had improved, the quota established by law had not been reached.

51. Other significant legal advances with regard to women included the Women and Development Pact, which established a number of commitments to gender equality. The Pact also provided for equal opportunities regardless of race, colour or social background. Other public policies focused on gender issues and legal equity had also been instituted. Panama had adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2001, and it had also adopted the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

52. **Ms. Kavun** (Ukraine) said that gender equality, sustainable development and peace were fundamental, interlinked objectives for the twenty-first century.

53. In line with the European Union, Ukraine considered gender equality and the empowerment of women to be a high priority at both the normative and policy levels, as well as an essential part of the development agenda. Her delegation thus fully supported the new gender architecture that had been proposed. Thanks to the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women, a gender perspective had increasingly been integrated by the United Nations system and other multilateral mechanisms; however, much remained to be done. The priority theme for the Commission's fifty-first session, namely "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" had been warmly welcomed by Ukraine.

54. The national legislative basis for the promotion of gender equality had been further expanded in recent years. Ukraine's Constitution guaranteed equal rights and opportunities in all spheres as well as protection for pregnant women and mothers, while a Law on Ensuring the Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men had entered into force on 1 January 2006. The country now had a legislative definition of sex-based discrimination for the first time in its history. A national gender equality programme (2006-2010) and reproductive health strategy (2006-2015) had also been adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers.

55. Ukraine had hosted an international summit for women in October 2007 in Kiev to commemorate the tenth anniversary of a landmark gathering of women leaders from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that had been held in Vienna, Austria. The 2007 summit had received high-level support within Government, including from the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

56. Sexual exploitation and trafficking remained one of the worst forms of violence against women, which was particularly rampant in situations of armed conflict. Governments should strengthen existing legislation in line with relevant General Assembly resolutions in order to strengthen the protection of the rights of women and girls and provide for the punishment of offenders. When a woman was raped, beaten or mutilated, it was not a cultural but a criminal problem, and no Government could deny its responsibility to suppress such crimes.

57. **Ms. Anbar** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that her Government reaffirmed its commitment to its strategic goals on the advancement of women and gender equality, in accordance with the Beijing Platform of Action and the outcomes of other relevant international conferences. Violence against women contradicted the most fundamental human rights, and combating such violence was a prerequisite to achieving gender equality and the advancement of women.

58. Her delegation emphasized the importance of women's access to education, training and health care, and it expressed its concern regarding the situation of Palestinian and Arab women living under Israeli occupation. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya called on the United Nations to take measures to put an end to occupation, in order to allow the Palestinian nation and women to live in dignity, peace and security, in implementation of recommendations adopted by

international conferences on the advancement of women. Her delegation also expressed concern at the precarious situation of African women due to poverty, disease and armed conflict.

59. Her Government strongly condemned the growing phenomenon of trafficking in women, and placed emphasis on the protocol regarding the punishment of those involved in human trafficking, especially trafficking in women and children.

60. Libyan women had made significant achievements thanks to the free education available to all Libyan nationals. Women were holding senior diplomatic, judicial and military positions, a breakthrough in positions traditionally occupied by men. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had been one of the first States to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was committed to integrating the Convention's provisions into national laws.

61. **Mr. Belinga-Eboutou** (Cameroon) said that discrimination, inequality, gender violence, abuse and poverty were women's daily lot. The intensity of the tragedy facing women varied between continents and countries, and such variation must be taken into account if real progress was to be achieved. The creation of stable and harmonious societies required concerted poverty-eradication efforts. It was not possible to talk of women's emancipation when women died giving birth because of the lack of hospitals or when they lacked access to markets for their produce owing to a lack of roads. Women could not participate in development unless they had access to appropriate credit, which was vital to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Women's lack of education must also be addressed worldwide.

62. Cameroon, for its part, had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2005 and was in the process of finalizing a bill to prevent and suppress violence against women and eradicate female genital mutilation. In 2004, it had become party to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

63. In 1999, the Government had adopted a political declaration and cross-cutting strategy to promote the participation of women in national development, with a focus on reducing gender inequality, strengthening women's access to financial resources and decision-making and remedying structural discrimination. Programmes to support rural women and retain girls in education had also been devised. The establishment of basic health infrastructure had been accelerated, with efforts to integrate reproductive health in primary services. A women's HIV/AIDS plan had also been adopted.

64. The protection of women was a national priority, it being vital that both sexes participated in the country's development. Real progress in realizing women's human rights, however, depended on strong international cooperation in support of comprehensive national policies. He could only stress that investing in women's advancement was to the advantage of the whole of society.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.